

Dumping Problems on Someone Else

By AE2 Thomas Herbert

As a supervisor, you sometimes have to assign numerous tasks to many people, which can spread your responsibilities over a broad area. As one person, I can be only in one place at a time. This problem becomes worse when, as a CDI, it involves inspecting work done on various discrepancies. These functions include final, acceptance, and, most importantly as I found out, in-process inspections.

Aircraft 601 was down for a popping left fuel-and-ignition circuit breaker, and the AEs were assigned the gripe. Since I was night-shift supervisor, I always looked for opportunities to train my subordinates. This gripe was a perfect time to train an up-and-coming third class. I let him at it, and he worked with a vengeance. He chased wires from circuit-breaker panels to junction boxes to engines.

The work continued for some time, and, when it was obvious he was becoming tired and frustrated, I joined

in the fight to find what was causing this terrible headache. After hours of troubleshooting and reading many test points with a multimeter, we decided to try eliminating components from the picture. We took another look at a schematic and thought the pilot's engine-control panel would be the best place to start. With power on, we pulled the panel. Once it was removed, he reset the breaker, and it stayed in. We both agreed that the panel was the problem and called maintenance control for permission to swap panels with another aircraft. This action would verify the bad part. With their approval, my co-worker grabbed a panel from the "hangar queen" and threw it into the plane.

We were disappointed because it didn't work. We both were fired up to take care of this problem, so I assigned the job of reinstalling the borrowed panel to another worker. That decision would let us continue uninterrupted.

Navy photo by PHAN Angela Virnig




Inspecting the wire bundles that connect to the engine-control panel, we found a wire chafing on a connector. All it took was a simple fix, and the aircraft again was up.

A few days passed, and that discrepancy was long behind us...or so I thought. At the beginning of our shift one day, we got a call that DCAG was flying around the boat because the fuel dump was inop on aircraft 603—the “hangar queen” we had robbed to get the replacement panel.

When that aircraft returned, we were hot on it, reading out wires. We quickly figured out that the fuel-dump valve wasn’t getting power. The wires went straight to the switch, which was on the engine-control panel, so that’s where we looked next. After removing the panel, the problem was obvious: A terminal had broken off the back of the fuel-dump switch. That panel was the same

one we had borrowed a few days before. The evidence of faulty maintenance was staring me in the face. We fixed the gripe this time.

Although I had inspected the installed panel for integrity, I was not there during the installation process; therefore, I did not see the condition of the wires before the panel went in.

My oversight and lack of supervision did not cause a mishap, damage material, or injure anyone, but I had screwed up. I was lucky the worst thing was DCAG had to fly longer than planned. The broken wire easily could have been part of an important emergency system. This event has taught me that, as a supervisor and a CDI, I have to be more proactive in all maintenance actions done under my direction. Spot checks and in-process reviews can improve maintenance practices. 

Petty Officer Herbert works in the AE shop at VAW-123.

Good To Be a Curious George

By AT3 Michael Jacildo

My shop received a call from the material-control work center for a part pickup. An antenna-select box ordered the night before had come in. When I opened up the container to do a receipt inspection, I noticed the panel also had a switch marked “cabin dump.” That label piqued my curiosity.


Thinking I may have picked up a part for the AME work center, I took the part to maintenance control to clarify the situation. They determined the panel had been ordered against a TACAN gripe on an “up” MAF.

A closer investigation revealed that this panel had the TACAN and IFF antenna-select switches, but it also had the cabin dump switch, making it a downing discrepancy when the box was pulled out of an aircraft—this one had been taken out of aircraft 502. Maintenance control changed the MAF to a “down” discrepancy, and the jet did not go flying. Training was held with the avionics, egress and maintenance-control work centers.

Miscommunication and lack of attention to detail resulted in the part being ordered improperly with a PROJ PRI (project-priority code) of AK7, indicating the aircraft was partial mission capable. It should have been ordered as AK0—not-mission capable. That simple coding would have made the gripe a “downer,” and it would have been flagged in the ADB for aircrew and maintainers to see.



Knowing whether a removed panel is an up or down gripe is critical to aircraft safety.

We were a bit lucky to catch this problem before it was too late. Lack of communication, inattention to detail, and complacency are common factors in most mishaps. We had several “holes in the cheese” lined up but found the problem in time. It really is necessary to train maintainers correctly and do by-the-book maintenance to prevent these types of situations. 

Petty Officer Jacildo works in the AT shop at VAQ-131.